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THE DIRECTOR OF CENTRAL INTELLIGENCE

WASHINGTON, D. C. 20505

National Intelligence Officers

23 November 1979

MEMORANDUM FOR: Director of Central Intelligence
Deputy Director of Central Intelligence

VIA : Bruce C. Clarke, Jr.
Deputy Director for National Foreign Assessment

Richard Lehman
National Intelligence Officer for Warning

FROM : [REDACTED]
Assistant National Intelligence Officer for USSR-EE

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SUBJECT : Monthly Warning Assessment: USSR-EE

1. Iran: Community representatives at the 20 November interagency warning meeting considered possible Soviet behavior in the event of US military action of some kind against Iran growing out of the present crisis with the Iranian regime. It was the general sense of the meeting that the Soviets would probably tend to avoid any particular response which they considered likely to lead to military confrontation with the US. At the same time, most analysts appeared confident that the Soviets would do their utmost within their perceived limits of safety to reap a political harvest in Iran and the Middle East from the US actions, without great regard for the effects on the bilateral Soviet-US political relationship. The consensus did not rule out the possibility of Soviet military initiatives provided that Moscow considered them unlikely to lead to combat with US forces. But beyond this, analysts found it difficult to specify possible Soviet reactive moves, since they would be heavily scenario-dependent, contingent upon the nature and duration of the specific US military initiatives in question as well as upon the ongoing Soviet appraisal of the Iranian political scene. In this situation, analysts were reminded of the obvious need for closest Community monitoring of any hints of possible changes in the posture of Soviet ground combat forces adjacent to the Iranian border, of relevant Soviet airborne forces, or of Soviet naval forces in the Indian ocean and the Mediterranean.

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2. Afghanistan. Analysts saw little change in the overall trends discussed in previous months. There was widespread agreement that beefed-up Soviet advisory support for Afghan government offensives in a few provinces had indeed brought some progress in those areas, but that in many places elsewhere the situation was worsening. There was no dissent from the consensus judgment that on balance, the position of the regime was still continuing gradually to deteriorate, and that the morale of the Army remained highly fragile. Analysts noted a clandestine report on the appearance of Soviet SIGINT direction-finding vans in the streets of Kabul; one hypothesis offered was that these were searching for suspected transmissions from rebels in the capital to rebel forces in the provinces. [REDACTED]

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3. Soviet Leadership. Recent evidence suggesting that Kosygin has been taken seriously ill, and may have had a heart attack, has compounded the possibility of sudden change in the Soviet leadership already created by Brezhnev's gradually deteriorating health. Analysts noted that Kosygin's departure could confront the leadership with difficult political choices, would threaten the delicate political balance in the Politburo, and might seriously affect subsequent maneuvering for the succession to Brezhnev. Thus the selection of Kirilenko to replace Kosygin as Premier might adversely affect Kirilenko's subsequent prospects for becoming General Secretary. On the other hand, the selection of another leading possibility, Defense Minister Ustinov, would again confront the leadership with the problem of whether or not to elevate a professional military man (a) as Defense Minister and (b) as Politburo member. In either case, the Politburo would also be sensitive to the effect of its choice upon the makeup of the Defense Council, in which the Premier is a member. Analysts agreed that one course the Soviets could take to sidestep such problems and choices would be to select First Deputy Premier Tikhonov, even though he may be regarded as much less capable than either Kirilenko or Ustinov. Even this expedient could create problems in the Politburo, however, in view of the past resistance in some quarters to the political advancement of Tikhonov, a Brezhnev protege. The net judgment thus appeared to be that Kosygin's demise would precipitate intensified infighting in the leadership and might result in a significant reallocation of assignments. [REDACTED]

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